

STEP EIGHT

*Made a list of all persons we had harmed,
and became willing
to make amends to them all.*

There are many spiritual principles involved in Step Eight: honesty, openness, willingness, faith, acceptance, and particularly love and forgiveness. In the first seven Steps, we worked on restoring our relationships with our Higher Power and ourselves. With this foundation in place we were now ready to begin restoring our relationships with others.

By acting on our character defects, we inflicted harm on ourselves and those around us. In the Seventh Step, we asked our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings. Step Eight reminded us that the Steps are in a particular order for a reason. Until we had taken Step Seven, we had not acquired the degree of humility necessary to make meaningful and sincere amends.

Upon coming to our first few meetings, some of us began to realize the havoc we had wrought upon our friends, families, and loved ones. Our first inclination was to rush out and make amends to those we cared about and had harmed. If we do this too early in the process, however, we run the risk of feeling rejection and failure, which can pose a threat to our recovery. Many of us used to say that we were sorry all the time, and would then continue to practice the same behavior. How could we possibly think that anyone would trust us or believe our amends until they had seen us acquire a degree of humility and observed a

real change in our behavior? This was the process we started by taking Step Seven.

To gain the true freedom that this program offers, we need to take responsibility for the actions and reactions resulting from our defects of character. It may appear at first that the focus of making amends is on others. In fact, the focus is on us — the true purpose of Step Eight is to enhance our own recovery.

Our objective was to begin clearing away the wreckage of our past so that we could facilitate our own spiritual awakening. By the time we worked our way through the process of making amends, the level of freedom we began to realize astounded us.

To start Step Eight, we wrote down whom we had harmed as a result of our character defects and precisely how we had done so. This list often included people who had passed away, or that we had little chance of ever seeing again. At this point in our recovery, however, the ability to make amends was irrelevant. We focused instead on the *willingness* to make them. The people, places, and things on our lists fell into certain categories: those for whom immediate amends were appropriate, those we would be willing to approach soon, those we would be willing to approach later, and a few that, at first, we couldn't imagine ever being willing to approach.

We examined our lists from another point of view. What kind of harm had we done? How severe had it been? How could we change that? The kind of harm we did falls into five basic categories: spiritual, social, mental, physical, and financial. To reopen old wounds that we may have felt were largely healed may seem pointless and painful, but we

found that this process was essential to our new life and our new beginning.

Spiritually, did we deny our loved ones faith? Did we force them to adhere to our belief with no respect for their own? Did we undercut their beliefs with cynicism or tear at their souls with sarcasm? Did we provide an adult example of a compassionate spiritual seeker?

Socially, did we isolate from society, denying our friends our company and support? Were we absent from our family and neglectful of their needs? Did we put marijuana, work, money, sports or entertainment before our responsibilities to our families and friends? Did we spend our days trying to control our loved ones or business associates by badgering them until they acquiesced to our demands? Did we play one friend against another? Were we cruel or unkind to the people in our lives? Did we treat them as we wanted to be treated? Did we lie by commission or omission? Did we exaggerate our importance while diminishing that of others? Did we gossip, slander, or unduly criticize friends, associates, or loved ones?

Mentally, did we live in our heads instead of in the here and now? Did we indulge in delusions, fantasies, and wishful thinking rather than using our mental faculties to good purpose for ourselves and others? Did we trick or torment our loved ones by playing mental games? Did we do wrong, then manage to make someone else look guilty?

Were we physically abusive to those around us? Did we passively stand by and let others abuse and batter us or our children? Was there anyone whom we assaulted, raped, or murdered? Did we sexually harm others by using them or cheating on them? Did we use our bodies as barter? Were we lazy; not doing our share of work?

Financially, were we miserly, depriving others of things that they needed? Or did we play the spendthrift, indulging our every whim but never putting aside a nickel for necessities? Did we cheat or steal from anyone? Were we trustworthy?

An honest look at our list gave us all pause. After we made our list we took it to our sponsor or spiritual advisor. We need counsel because, as addicts, we so often go to extremes. Some of us thought we had harmed everyone or nearly everyone we had ever met. Some of us denied that we had ever hurt anyone. Neither of these positions has merit. It is grandiose to think that we have hurt everyone. After all, we are not that influential. We are not the center of the universe, even if we thought we were. It is equally arrogant to suppose that any human being might go through life without harming anyone. We touch the lives of all those around us, sometimes in harmful ways. Our sponsors helped us sort this out.

Sometimes it is difficult for us to determine whether a person on our list has harmed us or we have harmed them. Those of us with traumatic childhood experiences often believed that the harm done to us was somehow our fault. Another good reason to share our lists with a sponsor or spiritual advisor is that an objective viewpoint can be of great help in these cases. Occasionally we had just as much trouble admitting our own responsibility in situations where we could only see what was done to us, neglecting our part.

At times, we were unwilling to make amends to someone we believed had wronged us in a particular situation. In order to become willing to make amends to these people it was important to focus on our own behavior, disregarding the actions of who or what we believed had

wronged us. We had to learn to forgive others before we made amends to them. We needed to forgive them, or we faced the possibility of never becoming willing to make an amends to them directly. We did this even though we may not have felt forgiving. The feeling of forgiveness may come some time after the act of forgiving. This is one way the principle of faith is practiced in Step Eight.

In order to find the willingness to make amends to everyone that we knew we had harmed, we sometimes had to pray for the willingness to be willing. We realized that just coming to MA is a start in making amends. We are no longer active drug addicts practicing a disease; we are recovering drug addicts practicing a healthy way of life.

An intimidating obstacle to the process of making amends was the realization that soon we would be making face-to-face contact with people who might be hostile, or who might not even be aware that we had wronged them. It was hard enough to admit these things to ourselves, to our Higher Power, and to another human being, but to actually visit or write to these people or organizations that we had wronged seemed overwhelming. These were some of the feelings that made it hard for us to honestly make our list. It was therefore necessary to take Step Eight as if there were no Step Nine.

Some of us needed to make amends to ourselves before we could make amends to others. However we approached it, we began to see that clinging to the wreckage of our past was more painful than becoming willing to change our ways.

One of the miracles of Step Eight is that it gives us permission to be true to ourselves. We stopped practicing our defects of character and eliminated the patterns of

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behavior that had caused harm to ourselves and others for much of our lives. We felt better about ourselves and had more confidence in our ability to be in relationships with others. We gained a new ability to trust ourselves and those around us. We discovered which of our actions were harmful and we became willing to stop them. Our feelings of guilt and shame decreased as our willingness to change increased. We began to have a desire to wipe the slate clean and face each new day without guilt. We were less attracted to drama and trauma and more attracted to sanity and serenity. We became willing to make amends to those we had harmed. Step Eight was the beginning of the end of our isolation. We were ready for Step Nine.